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Archbishop Sacker's

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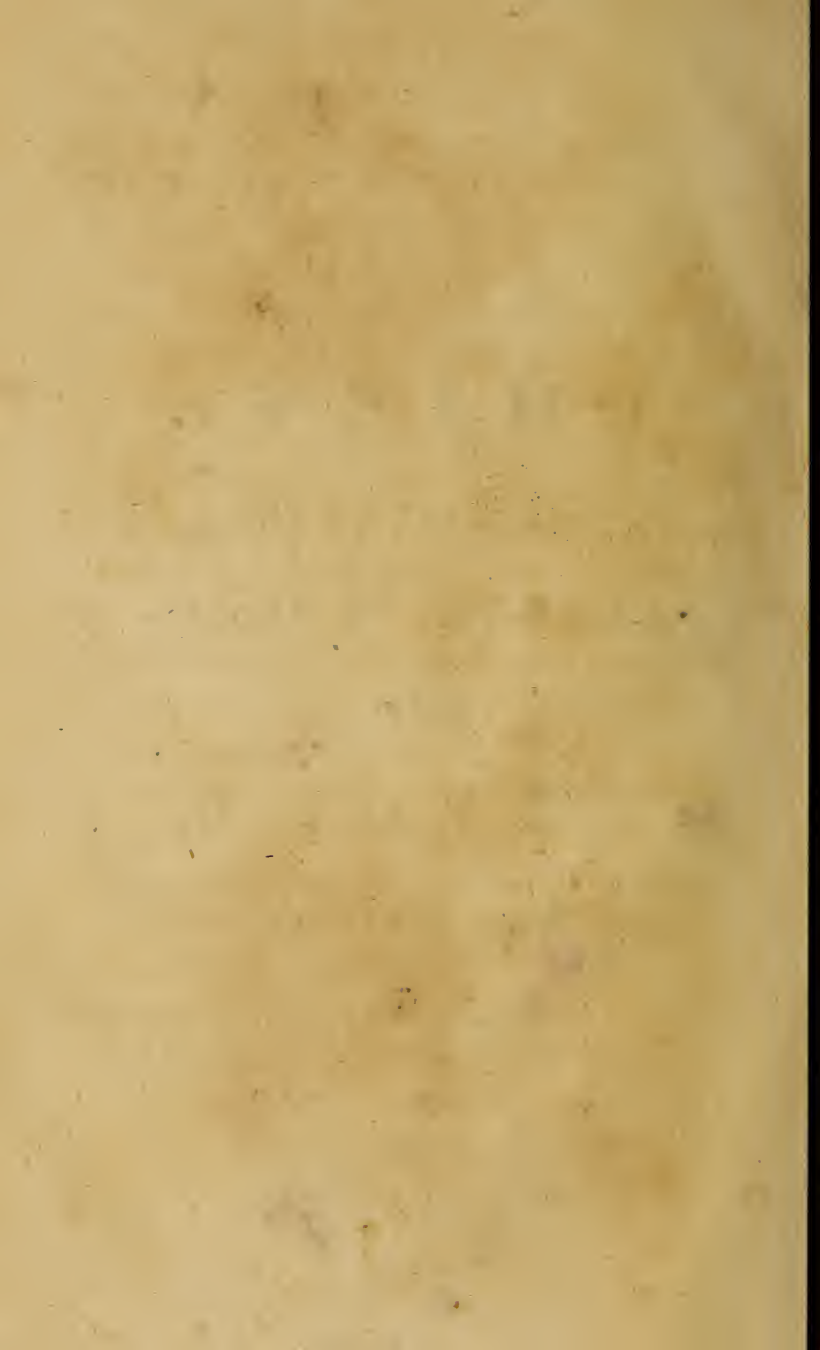
CLERGY of the DIOCESE

OF

OXFORD,

In the YEAR 1741.

Thomas Secker



Reverend Brethren,

WHEN I had first the Pleasure of meeting you, being very much a Stranger, I could only lay before you such general Admonitions as appeared to be seasonable in this unhappy Age of Irreligion and Libertinism. But having now obtained a fuller Acquaintance with Things, chiefly from your Answers to my printed Enquiries, which have given me many Reasons to esteem and respect you; I shall at present descend into some farther Particulars: and considering you, not merely as Ministers of the Gospel at large, but as Ministers of the several Parishes in which you officiate, remind you of some plain Directions for your doing it more successfully: which I shall deliver with less Diffidence, and you will receive with greater Regard, for their being chiefly such as have been often recommended

mended with good Effect on such Occasions as this.

I begin with one of the lowest in Appearance, but not the least important of ecclesiastical Employments : Catechizing the Children under your Care.

The Catechism consists of the fundamental Articles of Christian Faith and Practice. Without learning these we know not so much as what it is we profess to be ; and there is great Danger that unless Persons learn them at first, they will never learn them thoroughly : but only pick up from what they hear or read, unconnected and sometimes ill grounded Notions, that will never unite into a complete or a consistent Form of sound Doctrine : as I apprehend we have had too much Experience. The Rubric therefore requires, *that every Person learn the Catechism before his Confirmation*: and the 59th Canon, that *every Incumbent shall examine and instruct the young and ignorant of his Parish in it for half an Hour or more every Sunday*. Every second Sunday had been appointed before : but that I suppose was judged afterwards insufficient. Not that a strict Observation of this Rule was probably

probably expected, during the Winter Season, in the Generality of Country Parishes, or where the Children being few were more easily taught. But plainly it was intended, that how much Time soever was needful to do this Work well, should be faithfully employed in it. I thank God, there are very few Places in this Diocese, and I hope there will soon be none, where Catechizing is omitted. But I observe that in many it is practised only during Lent. Now I should apprehend that the Summer Season would in general be much more convenient both for the Minister and the Congregation. But at least the Space of a few Weeks is by no Means sufficient to fix the Knowledge of their Christian Duty so firmly in the Minds of young People, but that in the many Months which pass from the End of one Lent to the Beginning of another, a great Part of it will be to learn again. Therefore whenever this Exercise is begun, it should be continued much longer: and whenever the constant Repetition of it is left off, it should be occasionally resumed for a Sunday or two, at proper Distances of Time.

Another Defect in some Places is, that barely the Words of the Catechism are taught without any Exposition. Now the very plainest Expressions in it will need to be varied into others that are equivalent: else Children will too often learn Nothing but the Sound: and unless this Danger, which is a very great one, be guarded against, you will have spent both their Pains and your own to but small Purpose. Besides, all Sciences have their Terms, which must be interpreted to Beginners: and some of those in the Catechism are figurative ones; very prudently used, as they comprehend in a little Compass much Meaning, and lead to the understanding of the same Figures in Scripture; but undoubtedly used on Purpose to be explained: without which they are liable to make either no Impression or a wrong one. And farther still, a System so short as to be learned by Heart, must have Need, were it ever so clear, to be enlarged on; the Proofs of its Truth, the Connections and Tendency of its Doctrines, the Use and Extent of its Precepts to be shewn: and therefore since the Ca-

non with great Reason enjoins, not only that you examine, but instruct the Children in their Catechism, I hope you will think this a very needful Part of that Instruction. As to the Manner of it, that may be different, not only in different Places, but in the same at different Times. Sometimes a continued Discourse of some Length may be requisite : as it will lay before the adult Part of your Parishioners a methodical Summary of Christian Doctrine; which they often want very much for themselves, and will thus be enabled to teach something of to their Children, after they have heard it together from you.

Sometimes a cursory Exposition of the more difficult Expressions may deserve the Preference. But asking the Children Questions, relating to each Part, and procuring them to learn Texts of Scripture confirming each, will be always beneficial. The Words of the Catechism itself may be very usefully broken into shorter Questions and Answers : to which others may be added out of any one of the many good Expositions that have been made public. Only you should endeavour as soon and as much as you can to make this

a Trial and Improvement of the Understanding as well as the Memory of young People, by asking such Things as they should reply to in Words of their own; making that easy to them in every possible Way. And indeed, if many of your Questions were formed to be answered merely by affirming or denying, it would be a very good Method: and there is an Exposition drawn up in that Manner.

I am sensible that some Clergymen are unhappily obliged to serve two Churches the same Afternoon: who may therefore plead, that they have scarce ever Time to hear the Children repeat their Catechism, much less to explain it to them. And God forbid that any needless Addition should ever be made to their Burthen. But as I am sure they will be desirous of doing what they are able, in a Matter of this Importance, so I should hope that in the longer Days, at each of their Churches alternately, they might hear the Catechism repeated one Sunday, and expound Part of it another, or hear only Part of it repeated, and expound that, or find some Way to prevent the intire Omission of so necessary a Duty. And if these can do any Thing of this Kind,

Kind, there is no Doubt but others may easily do more.

But a farther Hindrance which I fear you complain of too justly is, that Parents and Masters are negligent in sending their Children and Servants; and the latter especially are both unwilling and often ashamed to come. Now the Canon doth indeed make Provision for punishing such. But persuading them would be much happier. And surely in so clear a Case, well timed and well judged Arguments, if persisted in, must do a great deal. The Example of their Equals or their Betters, if you have any under your Care that are wise enough to set a good one; or however that of your own Families, may help very much: and such little Rewards of good Books, or other Encouragements as you can give or procure for them, it may be hoped, will completely prevail with them. At least such as think they are either too old or too considerable to say the Catechism themselves, may be greatly improved by hearing others repeat, and you explain it.

But in some few Places it is pleaded, that the Children cannot read, and their Parents

either cannot or will not get them taught, and therefore the Foundation for their learning the Catechism is wanting. But surely some Person might be found, within a moderate Distance from every Place, to whom Parents might be induced, at least if something were contributed towards it, to send their Children to be instructed thus far. Or at the worst, they who cannot read might easily by Degrees learn so much as the Catechism by Heart: especially as the three main Parts of it are in every Sunday's Prayers. The Incapacity of reading was almost general at the Time of the Reformation: yet even in those Days the Clergy were able to teach first Parents and Housholders, then by their Means Children and Servants, the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments; and afterwards the rest of the Catechism. Now since that gross Darknes hath been so far enlightened, it cannot be impracticable to dispel the Remains of it.

After due Instruction follows Confirmation: an Appointment derived down from Apostolical Practice; and of such acknowledged Usefulness that in the Times of Confusion, a
hundred

hundred Years ago, when Bishops were rejected, some of their Adversaries took upon them to perform this Part of their Function : and within these few Years the Church of *Geneva* hath restored it in the best Manner their Form of Church Government will admit, and added an Office for it to their Liturgy. In our own Church the ancient Esteem of this Institution is, generally speaking, so well preserved, that I hope the Desire of being confirmed may not a little strengthen that of being instructed, as the only Way to it. And yet I must observe, that the Numbers from some Parishes have been in Proportion very small. This may not have arisen from any Neglect in the Minister : but as it ought to incline me to make the Opportunities of Confirmation as convenient as I am able ; so it ought to incline you, agreeably to the Nature of your Function, and the express Direction of the 61st Canon, to use your best Endeavours, that your Parishioners may gladly take those Opportunities. Yet I must entreat you to endeavour at the same Time, that none be brought, but those who, to speak in the Language of the Rubric, *are come to Years*

of Discretion, who have learned, not the Words only, but, in a competent Degree, the Meaning of what was promised for them in Baptism ; who can say with Seriousness and Truth, (what surely else they ought not to say at all,) that *in the Presence of God and the Congregation they ratify and confirm the same in their own Persons* ; and who therefore are likely to have useful and lasting Impressions made on them by this Solemnity. Undoubtedly some arrive at this Capacity sooner than others, and therefore I have mentioned the Age of Fourteen, not with a Design of absolutely tying you down to it ; but as being, for the most part, full early enough ; and that, where you see it requisite, you may, without giving Offence yourselves, oppose my Order to the indiscreet Forwardness of Parents ; whom however, I hope, it will make easy, to assure them, as I give you Authority, that so long as it pleases God to continue my Health and Strength, Confirmations shall be frequent in every Part of this Diocese. I must also desire that you will carefully instruct those whom you do bring, in the whole Nature of the Institution, and particularly in this, amongst
other

other more important Points, that they are never to be confirmed any more than baptized a second Time: that you will direct them to make the proper Answers audibly through the Whole of the Office, which many of them seem to have no Notion of, though it is so necessary in the Nature of the Thing, and tends so much both to fix their Attention, and to give the Solemnity a decent and edifying Appearance. You will caution them likewise not to crowd forward and incommode each other, using this Argument for one, that the whole Number who come in at the same Time, will be dismissed at the same Time also: and lastly you will press it strongly upon their Minds, that what they promise at their Confirmation, they are to remember and keep to their Lives End. I have already desired of you, on these Occasions, a List of such as you judge qualified; that so the Numbers and Persons may be known: of this you would do well to keep a Copy yourselves, and if it were written alphabetically, both you and I should be able to consult it upon the Spot more easily. For the abovementioned Canon, the 61st, plainly directs your Attendance

ance along with your Parishioners; to take especial Care (for so the Words run) *that none be presented but such as you know are fit.* And as your being present to approve or disapprove must needs increase your Influence and Authority amongst your People; it must likewise make the Discharge of my Duty so very much easier and more useful, that I beg you will never let me be without your Assistance in this Work, as you shall never be without mine in any Thing. And for this Purpose when Confirmations are on a Sunday, which is the Time I shall usually pitch upon, for the Convenience of the People, excepting at the Places of my Visitation, you may omit for that Day the Morning or the Evening Prayers as you see Occasion. I have not indeed hitherto been able to effect, what would greatly shorten your Labour, calling up your several Parishes in their Order separately. But I shall be very glad to do it, as soon as ever you can introduce this Order amongst them, which I earnestly recommend to you: and I hope a continued Frequency of Confirmations will soon make that feasible without Difficulty here, which is now
practised

practised constantly in the populous Cities of *London* and *Westminster*.

From Confirmation Persons ought to be led on, if possible, before the Impressions of it are much weakened, to the holy Sacrament: and it is one material Reason why Confirmation should not be too early, that with a little farther Instruction given soon after it, you may easily bring them, such as they ought to be, to the Lord's Table: which may prove a much harder Matter, when once they have been a good While out of your Hands. The small Proportion of Communicants which I find there is in most of your Congregations, and very small in some, must undoubtedly (as this Ordinance is appointed for all Christians, and for a standing Means of Grace to all) be a Subject of very great Concern to you. And though it is too true, that the Generality of the World, and perhaps the lower Sort beyond others, are incredibly obstinate in their Prejudices, especially in such as at all favour corrupt Nature: yet our complaining of these Prejudices is not enough; but labouring to overcome them is our Business, and we are not to grow weary
of

of it. Some imagine that the Sacrament belongs only to Persons of advanced Years, or great Leisure, or high Attainments in Religion, and is a very dangerous Thing for common Persons to venture upon. Some again disregard it stupidly, because others, they say, who do receive are never the better for it; or because their Friends before them, or their Neighbours about them never received at all, or not till such an Age: and why should they? You will therefore represent to them, that whoever receives without Benefit, it is his own Fault; and that how many soever omit it either for Part of their Lives or the Whole, not their Example but the Word of God is the Rule for Christians: that far from being a terrible or ensnaring Institution, it is in Reality a most gracious one: designed to be celebrated with Humility indeed, but with Comfort and Joy: that all the Preparation it requires is within the Reach of the plainest Head and the most laborious Hand, provided there be only an honest and pious Heart: and that the Judgement which unworthy Receivers eat and drink to themselves, needs no more af-

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fright those whom God in his Mercy will consider as worthy ; as he certainly will every true Penitent ; than the capital Punishments, threatened by the Law to Crimes, make innocent Persons uneasy : that he whose Life unfits him for the Sacrament, is unfit for the Kingdom of Heaven also ; and he, who being qualified for it, neglects it, neglects a dying Command of his Lord and Saviour, intended for the greatest Good to him. But your public Instructions on this Head will be much more effectual for being followed by seasonable private Applications : in which you will hear and answer their Objections, be they of ever so little Weight, with great Meekness ; not be provoked by any Perverseness of theirs to shew Anger, but only a friendly Concern ; and even if you meet with an absolute Repulse, leave them with an Assurance that you shall apply to them again, in Hopes that God will have disposed them better to obey his Precepts.

But besides increasing the Number of your Communicants, it were very desirable, that they who do communicate should do it more frequently. In the three first Centuries the
Eucharist

Eucharist was every where celebrated weekly, and in many Places almost daily. Decay of Piety occasioned an Injunction in the Sixth, that every Christian should receive thrice in the Year; which was reduced in the Thirteenth, perhaps with a bad Intention, to once. Our Church requires thrice *at the least*: which evidently implies, that more than thrice is hoped for. And indeed each Person will scarce be able to communicate so often unless the Communion be administered oftener. But besides, it is appointed to be every Lord's Day in Cathedral and Collegiate Churches, and Part of the Office for it is read every Lord's Day in every Church, for an Admonition of what it were to be wished the People could be brought to. This indeed at best must be a Work of Time: but one Thing might be done at present in all your Parishes, as God be thanked, it is in most of them: a Sacrament might easily be interposed in that long Interval between *Whitsuntide* and *Christmas*: and the usual Season for it, about the Feast of *St. Michael*, (when your People having gathered in the Fruits of the Earth have
some

some Rest from their Labours, and must surely feel some Gratitude to the Giver of all Good) is a very proper Time. And if afterwards you can advance from a quarterly Communion to a monthly one, I make no Doubt but you will:

Upon this Subject I must observe to you farther, that though in one or two Parishes of this Diocese the old Custom is retained, of Oblations for the Minister, as well as Alms for the Poor, to both which the Sentences appointed to be read are plainly adapted: yet in many Parishes there is no Offertory at all: though it be certainly a Practice of primitive Antiquity, a most proper Admonition and Specimen of Charity; which I fear the Generality of Christians much want to be reminded of; a most seasonable Demonstration of our loving our Brethren for his Sake, who hath loved us; and a Thing expressly enjoined in the Rubric of the Communion Office. Why therefore should you not attempt to revive it, where it hath been intermitted? Merely presenting to Persons an Opportunity of giving if they think fit, and only what they think

think

think fit, can surely (if the Reasons of it be explained to them beforehand) never keep any one away from the Sacrament. But then, though all who have not absolutely Nothing, ought undoubtedly to contribute their Mite, yet no disagreeable Notice should ever be taken of any, for giving but little or not giving at all: and whatever is collected, should be disposed of, so that all Persons may know it, with the greatest Faithfulness, Prudence, and Impartiality.

Another Part of divine Worship, concerning which I think it needful to speak, is Psalmody: a Part clearly appointed in Scripture, both expressive and productive of devout Affections, extremely well fitted to diversify long Services, and peculiarly to distinguish the several Parts of our own, which were originally separate. Our ecclesiastical Laws do not indeed require it under any Penalty: because there may not every where be Persons qualified to perform it decently. But wherever there are, the Rubric makes Provision for it, and I recommend to you that it be not omitted. You will always endeavour that your Parish-Clerks

Clerks be Persons of Discretion as well as Skill and Seriousness. But however you will be much surer of no Impropriety happening in this Part of the Worship, if you either direct them every Sunday to suitable Psalms, or assign them a Course of such to go orderly through. And unless the Generality of your Parishioners are provided with Books and able to make use of them; ordering each Line to be read, will both secure a greater Number of Singers and be very instructive to many who cannot sing. All Persons indeed who are by Nature qualified ought to learn, and constantly join to glorify him that made them, in Psalms and spiritual Songs. This was the Practice of the early Christians: it was restored very justly at the Reformation: and hath declined of late, within most of our Memories, very unhappily. For the Improvements made by a few in Church-Music, were they real Improvements, will seldom equal the Harmony of a general Chorus; in which any lesser Dissonances are quite lost: and it is something inexpressibly elevating, to hear the *Voice of a great Multitude, as the Voice of*

many Waters and of mighty Thunders, to speak in the Words of Scripture, making a joyful Noise to the God of their Salvation, and singing his Praises with Understanding. Persons of a ludicrous Turn may represent every Thing in a wrong Light : but those of any Seriousness, if they will lay aside false Delicacy, and that preposterous Shame of religious Performances, with which the present Age is so fatally tainted, will find themselves very piously affected only by hearing this Melody, much more by bearing a Part in it : and therefore I beg you will encourage all your Parishioners, especially the Youth, to learn Psalmody ; and excite them, if there be Need, with some little Reward : for you will thus make the Service of God abundantly more agreeable, and their Attendance on it more constant. . But then, where any Knowledge of the old common Tunes remains, you should endeavour principally, that your Learners may perfect themselves in these ; that so they may lead and assist the rest of the Congregation, who should always join with them ; or if you must admit a Mixture of new and uncommon Tunes, it should

Should be no greater than you find yourselves in Prudence absolutely obliged to. Else the Consequence will be, what I fear many of you have experienced, that either one Part of your People will resent being unjustly silenced, and this by the Introduction of Tunes often not so good as their former ones, and so your Parish will be divided and uneasy: or if they agree to the Change ever so generally and like it ever so well, yet your select Singers will either be weary in a While of what only Novelty recommended to them, or grow conceited and ungovernable, or die off, or be dispersed, and the Congregation will be left unable to sing in any Manner at all. Where indeed the newer Tunes have quite blotted out the Memory of the old ones, all you can do is, to make Use of what you find in Use, to get some of the easiest of them learnt as generally as you can, and keep to these. And if, in order to instruct your People in either Way of Singing, Meetings to practise out of Church-time be requisite, you will keep a strict Watch over them, that they be managed with all possible Decency, and never continued till Candle-

light, if they consist of both Sexes. You will likewise discountenance, at least, all frequent Meetings, between the Singers of different Parishes, and making Appointments to sing alternately at one anothers Churches: for this wandering from their own, which by Law they ought to keep to, usually leads them into Excesses and Follies.

I am very sensible, that some of the Things which I have been mentioning, are by no Means of equal Importance with others. But Nothing is without its Importance, that relates to divine Worship. The mere outward Behaviour of those who attend upon it is of such Use, and good Influence, that I must desire you will be diligent in teaching them, (but so as to persuade, not provoke them) what Reverence belongs to the House of God: particularly how very wrong it is to sit instead of kneeling when they are or should be addressing themselves to their Maker, and to shew how indecent that Appearance is of Disregard to him, which they would not use on any Account to one of their Fellow-creatures a little superior to themselves. If you could only breed up the
younger

younger to a right Behaviour in this Respect, your Congregations would grow regular in Time. But mild Expostulations will surely in so plain a Case produce some Effect upon the rest also, which will be much facilitated if you take Care that proper Conveniences for kneeling be provided for them. And if you could convince them also that standing is a more reverent Posture to sing Psalms to God in, as well as to read them, than sitting, you would come so much the nearer to the Apostolical Rule *of doing all Things decently*. For as some of the Psalms contain the noblest Acts of Adoration, surely they ought not to be sung in a Posture unfit to express it. Another Thing, and no small one, which I believe many of your Parishioners often want to be admonished of, is to come before the Service begins. Undoubtedly Allowance is to be made for necessary, especially unforeseen, Business, and some Allowance for not knowing the Time exactly: but I hope you will obviate both these Pleas as far as you can, by consulting their Convenience in the Hour you fix, and then keeping punctually to it. And at the same Time you will remind them,

that a due Degree of Zeal in Religion would incline them to be rather a great deal too early at the House of God, than a little too late: that no Part of the Service can be more needful for them, than that which comes first; the Confession of their Sins: that Instruction in their Duty is better learnt from the Psalms and Lessons, which are the Word of God, than from Sermons, which are only our Explanations of it: and that by coming so irregularly, they not only are great Losers themselves, but disturb and offend others.

But it is not sufficient to give you Directions about such as do come to Church, without taking Notice of the great Numbers which I find there are in many, if not most, of your Parishes, that omit coming. Now on these your Preaching indeed can have no immediate Influence. But it may however prevent the Increase of them; and furnish others with Arguments against them; and with the best of Arguments, their Experience of its good Effects. You will therefore questionless do all you can in this Way, without using any Expressions in Relation to their Fault, which

if repeated to them may exasperate them. But your chief Dependance must be on private Application to them, varied suitably to the Occasion of their Neglect. If it arises merely from Ignorance, or Sloth, or Want of Thought, they must be plainly told what they owe to their Maker, and awakened to the Hopes and Fears of a future Life. If it be Desire of Gain or of Pleasure that keeps them away, they must be asked what it will *profit them to gain the whole World and lose their own Souls?* or shewn that to be *Lovers of Pleasure more than of God* will end in Pains eternal. If they defend themselves, by pleading, as some will, that Nothing can be told them at Church but what they are acquainted with already, it will surely not be hard to shew them that they over-rate their Knowledge: that if this were otherwise they may however be reminded of what they did not think of, or excited to what they did not practise: that, were they too perfect to receive any Benefit, it would not be decent for them to tell the World so by their Behaviour: that at least they ought to set others an Example who may be the better for public Instruction: and lastly, that

receiving Instruction is not the Whole of divine Service, but Praying the chief Part. And though it is allowed they can pray at Home privately, yet without enquiring whether they do, since God hath commanded, for plain and important Reasons, that we worship him publicly, and hath excepted no one: by what Authority doth any one except himself? And what will this end in, but an universal Neglect of a Duty which our Maker hath required to be universally practised? If it be any Scruple about the Lawfulness of coming to Church that keeps Persons away, fit Opportunities should be sought with great Care, and used with great Prudence, to set them right: and such Dissenters, for many there are, as do not think our Manner of Worship sinful, but only prefer another, which perhaps they are often without the Means of attending upon, should be seriously entreated to consider, how they can justify separating from a lawful Communion appointed by lawful Authority, and even omitting all public Worship frequently, rather than worship with us. But then with whichsoever of these Persons we discourse, not the
least

least personal Anger must be shewn, Nothing but a Concern about their future Happiness. For by this Means if we make them no better, we shall at least make them no worse, and perhaps may leave in their Hearts what will some Time or other work there. Persons who profess themselves not to be of our Church, if Persuasions will not avail, must be let alone. But other Absenters after due Patience must be told in the last Place, that unwilling as you are, it will be your Duty to present them, unless they reform: and if, when this Warning hath been repeated, and full Time allowed for it to work, they still persist in their Obstinacy, I beg you to do it. For this will tend much to prevent the Contagion from spreading, of which there is else great Danger: and when once you have got them, though it be against their Inclinations, within Reach of your Pulpit, who knows what Good may follow? Different Cases may indeed require Difference of Treatment: and both the same Severity and the same Mildness, that will subdue one, will harden another. You will therefore act yourselves and advise your Church-wardens to act in this Matter
according

according to your Discretion. And after a Prosecution is begun, it shall still depend on your Opinion whether it shall be carried on with Rigour, or suspended a While in Hopes of Amendment. Only one Caution I would give you. Let not any Person's Threatenings, that, if he is prosecuted, he will go over to the Dissenters, move you in the least. Such will seldom do what they threaten: or if they do, 'tis better they should serve God in any Way than none; and much better they should be a Disgrace to them than to us. I must not conclude this Head without desiring you to remind your People, that our Liturgy consists not only of Morning but Evening Prayer also: that the latter is in Proportion equally edifying and instructive with the former; and so short, that, generally speaking, there can arise no Inconvenience from attending upon it, provided Persons are within any tolerable Distance from the Church: that few of them have Business at that Time of Day; and Amusements ought surely never to be preferred on the Lord's Day before Religion: not to say that there is Room for both.

But besides the public Service, your People

ple should be admonished to spend a due Part of their Sabbath in private Exercises of Piety. For this is almost the only Time, that the far greater Part of them have, for meditating on what they have heard at Church; for reading the Scripture and other good Books; for the serious Consideration of their Ways; for giving such Instruction to their Children and Families, as will make your Work both easier and more effectual. And therefore, though one would not by any Means make their Day of Rest wearisome, nor forbid Cheerfulness, and even innocent Festivity upon it, much less the Expressions of neighbourly Civility and Good-will, which are indeed a valuable Part of the gracious Ends of the Institution: yet employing a reasonable Share of it seriously at Home as well as at Church, and preserving an especial Reverence of God even throughout the freer Hours of it, is necessary to make it a Blessing to them in Reality, instead of a Season of Leisure to ruin themselves, as it proves too often.

But farther, besides your and their Duty on the Lord's Day, it is appointed, that all Ministers of Parishes read Prayers on Holy-days,

days, on Wednesdays, and Fridays: and undoubtedly your Endeavours to procure a Congregation at such Times ought not to be wanting. Were I to repeat to you the strong Expressions which my great Predecessor Bishop *Fell* used, in requiring this Part of ecclesiastical Duty, they would surprize you. But I content myself with saying, that public Worship was from the very first Ages constantly performed on the two stationary Days of each Week; that all Holydays appointed by the Church were carefully observed by the Clergy, and the Number of them now is not burthensome: that where you can get a competent Number to attend at these Times, you will act a very pious and useful, as well as regular Part: that your own Houses will sometimes furnish a small Congregation; and what Success you may have with others, Nothing but Trials, repeated from Time to Time, can inform you. But they, whose Parishioners are the fewest and the busiest of all, I hope do not fail of bringing them to Church at the least on Good Friday, and Christmas Day, besides Sundays. For though in some of your An-

swers

swers to my Enquiries, these are not mentioned as Prayer Days, yet I presume that this arose from your taking it for granted I should understand they were. But if in any Place they be not, I earnestly entreat they may: for at such Times there can be no Difficulty of getting a Congregation. I hope likewise, that you are not wanting in due Regard to those which are usually called *State* Holy-days: and particularly, that if the public Fast, which hath been appointed these two last Years, should be continued (as we have but too much Reason to apprehend there will be Need) I beg you will endeavour, not only to bring your Parishioners to Church on that Occasion; but move them to such inward Humiliation for their own Sins, and such Fervency of Prayer for this most corrupt and wicked Nation, as may avert, if it be possible, the just Judgments of God which so visibly threaten us.

You must have understood, Brethren, in all you have heard, that I am not exhorting you to promote in your Parishes a mere Form of Godliness without the Power. Outward Observances, by whatever Authority appointed,

pointed, are only valuable in Proportion as they proceed from a good Heart and become Means of Edification and Grace. They are always to be reverently regarded, but never rested in: for Persons may observe without the least Benefit, what they cannot omit without great Sin. The Business of your Parishioners therefore is, so to use the external Part of Religion, as to be inwardly improved by it in Love to God and their Fellow-creatures and in moral Self-government: and your Business is to apply both your public and private Diligence, that this happy End be effectually attained. You have under your Care great Numbers of poor Creatures, living very laborious Lives in this World, and depending almost intirely on you for their Hopes of another. It is a noble Employment to direct their Behaviour and lighten their Toils here, by Precepts and Motives which lead them on at the same Time to Happiness hereafter. You will be sure of their Acknowledgments at least in Proportion as you succeed in this Work; but you will be rewarded by God in Proportion as you endeavour it. Think not therefore,
that

that I am laying Burthens upon you, but only *stirring up your Minds by Way of Remembrance*, and exhorting you so to watch for the Souls of Men as they *that must give Account, that you may do it with Joy and not with Grief*. It is very little in my Power either to increase or lessen your Duty. Our blessed Master hath fixed it; you have undertaken it: and were I to release you from ever so great a Part of it, I should only bring Guilt on myself without acquitting you at all. The Injunctions of the New Testament, infinitely stricter than any of Men, would continue to bind you as firmly as ever. *Take Heed therefore to the Ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfil it.*

Having a Subject of such a Nature to speak to you upon, and being able to speak to you in a Body but once in three Years, you must not wonder if I go somewhat beyond the Bounds of a common Discourse. There are many other Things and very material ones, relating to you as Parish Ministers, which I could have wished to mention now: But I was willing to treat first of such Matters as belong
more

more immediately to the Worship of God. If it please him that I live to another Visitation, I shall in that proceed to the rest. Permit me now to add but one Word or two more upon a different Subject and I have done.

Whilst we are serving Christianity here, with the Advantage of a legal Establishment and Maintenance, there are vast Multitudes of our Fellow-subjects in *America*, their Negro-Slaves, and the neighbouring *Indians*, amongst whom the Knowledge of God is taught, and the Exercises of his Worship supported, if at all, very imperfectly, and with great Difficulty, by the Society for propagating the Gospel: the Income of which depends entirely on the voluntary Contributions of good Christians; and is now reduced so low, and burthened with such a Debt, that they find it necessary to propose, this next Year, according to the Powers of their Charter and with his Majesty's recommendatory Letters, a general Collection, which they have not had for above 20 Years past, to enable them to go on. Application will

will probably not be made to every Parish separately. But I hope every Minister will give this excellent Design all the Assistance in his Power : such, as can afford it, either by becoming stated Contributors and Members of the Society ; or at least by some occasional Benefaction in this Time of Need ; and all, by recommending the Case to such of their People or Acquaintance as they have Reason to think will pay Regard to it. If any Person desires a more particular Acquaintance with the Nature and Usefulness and present Condition of this Undertaking, I have given some Account of these Matters in a Sermon at their anniversary Meeting lately published by me, and shall be ready to give any of you farther Information, who shall either now or hereafter apply to me for it, personally or by Letter.

But I must not yet conclude, without mentioning also the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge : who are carrying on the same good Work in the *East Indies*, which that for propagating the Gospel is in the *West* ; and at the same Time are pro-

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moting the Cause of Religion many Ways here at Home : particularly by selling at very low Rates, Bibles, Common-Prayers, and Numbers of other religious Books, chiefly of small Sizes, for the Use of the Poor. This they also are supported in by voluntary Benefactions : to which whoever is able to contribute, will do a very good Work : and whoever can only purchase a few of their Books for the Use of his Parishioners, shall have both my best Assistance in it, and my hearty Thanks for it.

I do not mean at all in speaking of these Things to prescribe to you the Methods of your Charity : but only to lay before you two very deserving ones, which may possibly have escaped the Notice of some of you ; and to endeavour, that the Cause of our Lord and Master may be served in as many Ways as it can : for you must be sensible how very great Need there is that none be neglected. By zealously making Use of such as are presented to us, we may possibly be of much more Service to others than we expect : but we shall be sure of doing infinite Service to

ourselves. And *may God stir up the Wills of all his faithful People, that they plenteously bringing forth the Fruit of good Works may of him be plenteously rewarded through Jesus Christ our Lord* ^a.

^a Collect for the 25th Sunday after Trinity

305/3-4

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Late LORD ARCHBISHOP of CANTERBURY.

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